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ABSTRACT

If high school graduates are to be fully prepared for entering and maintaining employment, a more substantial instructional effort is required from career educators in the teaching of work habits, attitudes, and interpersonal relations in grades K-12. To ascertain what employers feel are important qualities for their employees, twenty-three employers representing a cross-section of occupations and locations were interviewed in New Hampshire. Their answers provide insight into three major areas of employee evaluation: how to get a job, emphasizing the importance of the interview; how to hold a job, focusing on the probationary period and on-the-job performance; and the importance of work habits, rating trustworthiness and working flexibility as the most desirable characteristics with personal appearance, hygiene, respectfulness, and cooperativeness as close seconds. In order for career education to prepare students to meet these expectations of employers, it must (1) offer explicit instruction in personal development; (2) provide students with first-hand experiences in job search skills by having them fill out sample application forms, role-play interviews, view films of interviews, write resumes, and hear local personnel managers visiting the classroom discuss the job interview process; (3) teach students how employers will evaluate their job performances; (4) use a wide range of instructional materials and media which address the areas of career and personnel development; and (5) grade students on work habits, attitudes, and interpersonal skills, as well as on program content and vocational skills. (EIG)

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HOW EMPLOYERS EVALUATE THEIR EMPLOYEES: IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER EDUCATION

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FOREWARD

This paper parallels a study conducted by the author and Ms. Patricia McLarky Groves under a grant with the U.S. Office of Education through the New Hampshire Research Coordinating Unit. A study publication, How New Hampshire Employers Evaluate Their Employees -- Implications for Vocational Education, resulted from this sponsored research in the spring of 1977. This publication is available from the author.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

What makes a good career education program? Are there are universally accepted criteria for career education program quality?

A recent study conducted by the Center for Vocational Education at the Ohio State University (April, 1975) used the Delphi Technique to help develop a rank order of agreed-upon criteria for vocational program quality.

Using two rounds under the Delphi format, 66 criteria for quality were ranked by more than 500 vocational educators from all levels of involvement.

As one might expect, the number one criteria was "Program content is current with occupational practice." It has been traditional to examine and re-examine vocational program content with craft committees to insure that this criteria of quality is present in all vocational programs.

However, once they are employed, vocational program graduates are evaluated from a number of points of view and the evaluation involves more than simply the vocational tasks performed. In fact, students who are employed in larger agencies -- such as insurance companies, production industries, health services and retailing businesses -- often find performance evaluations relate only in small ways to specific job skills. Factors such as interpersonal relationships, personal appearance, punctuality, motivation, and self-direction are given high priority as part of the periodic performance review. These facts have implications for career education programs at the elementary and secondary level.

Another study completed by the University of Tennessee (Porreca and Stallard, 1975) concluded that "affective domain competencies of students appears to be as important as cognitive and psycho-motor competencies in vocational-technical education."

Thus, while vocational educators are quite confident that the specific vocational skills taught in a given program are "current with occupational practice," they are not fully aware (nor are the students) of those other aspects of the world-of-work environment upon which their graduates will be evaluated.

To continue to develop quality career education and vocational programs, we must know the full extent of employer expectations above and beyond specific vocational skills.

It is the purpose of this research to learn of these employer expectations and accomplish the following two objectives:

(1) To determine current employer practices in personnel performance evaluation.

(2) To inform career educators, vocational teachers, and guidance counselors of these employer practices so that they might make program or counseling service modifications to better acquaint students with these practices.

METHODOLOGY

For the results of this study to be useful to the career educator, first-hand knowledge of the actual methods employers currently use to evaluate their employees was essential.

The best way to gain this information was through face-to-face interviews with the personnel departments which have the responsibility for hiring of new employees and evaluating existing employees.

Interviews were conducted with twenty-three (23) employers across the state of New Hampshire to learn of their current procedures in employee evaluations. These interviews were held with businesses and industries of diverse size and geographic location -- industries representative of many career areas.

The interview process offered employers three methods of providing data and materials:

(1) Employers responded to a standard set of prepared questions.

(2) Employers offered open-ended comments about their methods of employee evaluations.

(3) Copies of evaluation materials which employers use for employee evaluations were obtained.

The instrument used in the interviews posed the following five questions for directing the discussion:

(1) Does your company/organization use a written evaluation form which deals with the performance of your employees? If so, could we please have a sample copy?

(2) In hiring new personnel, what are the six basic factors you feel are most important?

(3) How are employee evaluations for pay raises or promotion conducted in your company/organizations?

(4) Who is involved in these evaluations?

(5) What are the most common reasons for termination of an employee?

In addition to these standard questions, each personnel representative was asked to rank the relative importance of the following ten factors of work attitudes.

1. **PERSONAL HYGIENE AND APPEARANCE:** the person is appropriately attired.
2. **TRAINABILITY:** the person accepts constructive criticism, follows instructions willingly and performs consistently.
3. **SELF-CONFIDENCE:** the persons believe their own actions influence future events.
4. **RESPECTFULNESS:** the person respects co-workers, supervision and property.
5. **TRUSTWORTHINESS:** the person can handle information discreetly and respects confidences.
6. **OPTIMISM:** the person expects good from people and satisfaction from the natural course of events.
7. **WORKING FLEXIBILITY:** the person is willing to work hours requested, is on time and is present all days required.
8. **RESPONSIBILITY:** the person is able to handle responsibility justly and able to work under stress.
9. **AMBITIOUS:** the person is striving for advancement or growth.
10. **COOPERATIVE:** the person is able to work well with others.

Twenty-three employers were identified and interviewed. In most cases, the personnel representative hired from high school graduates for various job responsibilities. For example, a large electronics company might employ secretaries, engineers, draftsmen, and machinists. The employers were selected based on these considerations.

* Many occupational areas were represented.
* Both urban and rural employers were represented.
* Small, medium, and large employers were represented.

In addition to the interviews, the researchers also attended professional meetings of personnel managers and participated in training seminars for personnel. From these we were able to gain perspective and insight into the tasks personnel managers are required to do. Employee evaluation is critical because so much is at stake -- for the people rejected, for the people hired, for the people promoted, and for the people fired.

The interviews were designed to find the answer to two basic questions:

(1) What techniques are being used during the interviewing/ hiring process to determine which potential employee to hire?

(2) What techniques are being used once an employee is on the job to assess his or her potential and performance?

FINDINGS

There are many more qualified applicants applying for most jobs than can possibly be hired. Personnel management has a difficult task in finding the best person for the company. The definition of "best person" is a person who will be an asset to the company -- one who will stay with the company and work hard. Personnel people are trained in the art of communication-questioning skills, listening skills, and understanding non-verbal communications. It is their job -- within legal confines -- to gather as much information about an applicant in order to make the best possible hiring decision.

The job market in many areas continues to be very tight. And the new high school graduates enter this market with some strong strikes against them. Specifically, the graduates are:

* Young
* Inexperienced
* Statistically not stable on the job.

Career educators have the opportunity to change these debits to credits. Our findings clearly indicate that graduates who know what they want and what they have to offer, and who have cultimated human relations skills, will interview effectively and be more successful in landing a job.

Our findings are extensive and will be presented in three broad areas:

I. Evaluation prior to employment - "How to Get a Job"

II. Evaluation after employment - "How to Hold a Job"

III. The Importance of Work Attitudes

HOW TO GET A JOB:

EVALUATION PRIOR TO EMPLOYMENT

The minute a young man or woman makes contact with a potential employer, the evaluation process beings. Thus, competition for jobs begins long before a person even has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her vocational skills. Graduates of all school programs, therefore, require skills in the job interview process if they are to improve their changes of obtaining the job they want.

In many organizations the interview process itself has a number of steps beginning with the initial contact with the receptionist.

When the job applicant is brought to the company, sometimes the personnel receptionist will "code" the application form with some brief general impressions of the applicant. The receptionist may also choose to pass the application on to personnel or file it away.

The second step is usually a meeting with a member of the personnel department. The purpose of this stage of the interview process is important to keep in mind. Here the applicant has a chance to convince personnel that he or she has the necessary qualifications and is the right person for the job. Personnel managers look for the relevant information needed to make the hire/reject decision. The interview with personnel usually emphasizes identification of work habits and attitudes. Specifics being considered are aptitude, personality, motivation and character. Personnel will be alert to the manner of response pauses that may indicate avoidance of critical issues -- and will investigate further in these areas. In essence, every possible factor is considered by the interviewer and then evaluated. It is his job to decide if the job specifications and the applicant's skills will match.

The third part of the screening process is performed by the department supervisor who assesses the applicant's specific job skills. This interviewer also assesses work attitude factors. Personality traits often play an important role -- it is in the company's best interest to hire a person who will be an asset, a person who will get along well with other employees.

While variations in the evaluation prior to employment often occur, affective domain competencies are always considered. Sometimes an informal score card is maintained on each applicant with all interviews being recorded. Such a record is important and valuable when large numbers of applicants apply for a given position. This pre-employment record is destroyed as soon as the applicant is hired or rejected.

Professional personnel workers are fully aware and respectful of the legal structure which restricts the questions job applicants are required to answer. In fact, it was suggested that students be taught the laws governing equal employment opportunities.

HOW TO HOLD A JOB:

EVALUATION AFTER EMPLOYMENT

Personnel evaluation after employment is a more extensive and formal process.

Nearly every employer has a probationary period for the new employee. During this time, a mutual evaluation of the employer-employee relationship and the job environment takes place. It is understood that during this period, either party can terminate the employment with no recriminations.

Most employers have required procedures and forms which are used in periodic employee evaluations. These forms show clearly that employee evaluations hinge strongly on personal and attitudinal factors as well as cognitive and psychomotor skills.

Most employers evaluate their employees for three reasons: pay raises, promotion, and personal improvement. Evaluations for these purposes are usually performed at the same time and with the use of the same questionnaires. Some employers, however, believe these evaluations should be done separately to allow employee growth and development to be emphasized and separated from salary and promotion consideratons.

There are three different types of job evaluations performed: One for hourly wage positions; one for salaried non-exempt, such as office workers and technicians, and one for salaried exempt or managerial positions. The affective domain competencies appear to be more important in the salaried positions.

In all of these positions the evaluation usually begins with the immediate supervisor. The criteria used include cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domain competencies. The employee's evaluation and his supervisor's evaluation are then compared and a decision is reached concerning the pay raise or promotion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK ATTITUDES

Each of the twenty-three (23) employers was asked to rate the relative importance of the ten factors which comprise working attitudes. While there were some differences, the following pattern was recorded.

WORKING ATTITUDES

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Not Important	Definitely Not Important	Does Not Apply
1. PERSONAL HYGIENE AND APPEARANCE: the person is appropriately attired.		■			
2. TRAINABILITY: the person accepts constructive criticism, follows instructions willingly and performs consistently.		■			
3. SELF-CONFIDENCE: the person believes his own actions influence future events.		■			
4. RESPECTFULNESS: the person respects co-workers, supervision and property.		■			
5. TRUSTWORTHINESS: the person can handle information discreetly and respects confidences.	■				
6. OPTIMISM: the person expects good from people and satisfaction from the natural course of events.		■			
7. WORKING FLEXIBILITY: the person is willing to work hours requested, is on time and is present all days required.	■				
8. RESPONSIBILITY: the person is able to handle responsibility justly and able to work under stress.		■			
9. AMBITIOUS: the person is striving for advancement or growth.		■			
10. COOPERATIVE: the person is able to work well with others.		■			

An analysis of the above table indicates:

* The factors of TRUSTWORTHINESS and WORKING FLEXIBILITY were rated the highest in terms of employer importance.

* The factors of PERSONAL HYGIENE and APPEARANCE, RESPECTFULNESS, and COOPERATIVENESS were close seconds.

* Other characteristics added to the list in the "other" category involved being Dependable, Hard-working, Economic-minded, and Stable.

* There were a number of occupations with specific characteristics which one might expect, such as:

  Personal hygiene and appearance were extemely important in health related occupations as well as business and office occupations.

  Trainability was ranked very high in the manufacturing and technical industries.

  Self-confidence was a factor which employees looked for in identifying future leadership potential.

  Responsibility was another factor in identifying leadership or supervisory potential.

HOW THE CAREER EDUCATOR CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This study has demonstrated that if educational programs are to be considered "current with occupational practice," there must be provision for instruction in the importance of work habits, attitudes and interpersonal communication skills as part of the program.

When asked if they address work habits and attitudes in their programs, teachers and counselors usually indicate that these concepts are implied or discussed all the time. In fact, some of these factors are part of the grading process. However, this is not enough. If our high school graduates are to be fully prepared for entering and maintaining employment, a more substantial instructional effort in the teaching of work attitudes and interpersonal relations is required.

Suggestions for action:

(1) Career Education programs should have explicit instruction in personal development including work habits, attitudes, and interpersonal communication skills.

(2) All students must receive first-hand experiences in job-seeking skills. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, such as:

   a. Study, complete, and discuss sample job application forms.

   b. View films on the job interview process.

   c. Role-play the job interview with fellow students an and instructors.

   d. Invite a local personnel manager to the classroom to discuss the job interview process and to demonstrate (role-play) various interview situations.

   3. Assist the students in writing a resume.

(3) All students must be knowledgeable in the purposes and methods which employers use to evaluate their on-the-job performances. The materials collected as part of this study provide a number of examples of actual evaluation instruments currently used by employers. These might be used by students to self-evaluate their performance in educational programs.

(4) All teachers should have access to a wide variety of instructional materials and media which address the areas of career and personal development. Commercial production of these materials has increased dramatically over the past few years and their cost is most reasonable. While some of the materials are designed for specific vocational areas, most are generalized and can be used in a variety of program areas. A comprehensive bibliography of instructional materials for teachers was compiled as part of this study.

(5) Feedback (grading) to students enrolled in our high schools should include achievement in work habits, attitudes, and interpersonal skills as well as grade reporting on program content and vocational skills.